

PIERRE RADISSON, BUSHRANGER.

BY BECKLES WILLSON.

NOTE.—In the May number of the CANADIAN MAGAZINE were described the exploits of Radisson and Groseilliers, the two fur-traders to whom the inception of the Hudson's Bay Company is due. It will be recalled that they captured Fort Nelson (afterwards York Factory), and carried off the English, their former associates, prisoners to a French fort. But in spite of this betrayal, Radisson seems to have hankered after the Company's good-will and employment. He soon afterwards returned to France, leaving Chouart, his nephew, in charge of Fort Bourbon. These chapters, full of highly important unpublished material, form part of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, shortly to be published under the title of "The Great Company."

LORD PRESTON who held in the year 1684 the post of Ambassador Extraordinary of King Charles II. at the Court of Versailles, was advised of the return to Paris of the bushranger Radisson in these terms:

"My Lord: It has just reached our ears and that of his Royal Highness the Duke of York, Governor of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company, that the person who has caused all the recent trouble in the Hudson's Bay regions whereby our merchants have suffered so much at the hands of the French, is at this moment in Paris. As it is much in the interests of the nation as of the company that there should be no repetition of these encroachments and disturbances it might be advantageous for your Lordship to see this Mr. Radisson who, it is believed, could be brought over again to our service if he were so entreated by your Lordship. His Royal Highness, together with the other Honourable partners, are con-



RE-DRAWN FROM A RARE OLD PARIS PRINT.

PIERRE ESPRIT RADISSON.

vinced from his previous conduct that it matters little to Mr. Radisson under whose standard he serves, and that, besides, he is secretly well-disposed toward us, and this in spite of his late treacherous exploits which have given great offence to the nation and damage to the Company."

This private note was signed by Sir

John Hayes and Mr. Young on behalf of the company. On its receipt by Lord Preston, he at once sent an emissary, Captain Godey, to seek out Radisson and make overtures to him. On the third floor of a house in the Faubourg St. Antoine, surrounded by a number of his relations and boon companions, the dual traitor was discovered, deeply engaged in drinking healths and in retailing his adventures to the applause of an appreciative circle. Upon the walls and mantelpiece of the apartment and such meagre furniture as it boasted, were disposed numerous relics and trophies, bespeaking a thirty years' career in the Transatlantic wilderness.

"Radisson himself," remarks Godey, "was apparelled more like a savage than a Christian. His black hair, just touched with grey, hung in a wild profusion about his bare neck and shoulders. He showed a swart complexion, seamed and pitted by frost and exposure in a rigorous climate. A huge scar, wrought by the tomahawk of a drunken Indian, disfigured his left cheek. His whole costume was surmounted by a wide collar of marten's skin; his feet were adorned by buckskin moccasins. In his leather belt was sheathed a long knife." Such was the picture presented by this uncouth, adventurous Huguenot, not merely in the seclusion of his own lodgings, but to the polished and civilized folk of Paris of the seventeenth century. What were the projects harboured in this indomitable man's mind? In spite of his persistent intrigues it is to be doubted if he, any more than Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, was animated by more than a desire to pursue an exciting and adventurous career. Habitually holding out for the best terms, he does not appear to have saved money when it was acquired, but spent it freely. When he died he was in receipt of a pension from the Company, so far insufficient to provide for his manner of living that they were forced to pay his remaining debts.

Unabashed by the surroundings thus presented to him, Captain Godey an-

nounced himself, shook hands with the utmost cordiality with Radisson, and pleaded to be allowed to join in the convivial proceedings then in progress. The better to evince his sincerity, without further ceremony he accepted and drank as full a bumper of bad brandy and applauded with as much heartiness as any man of the party, the truly astonishing tales of their host.

Godey was the last of the guests to depart.

"Look you," said he, when he and Radisson were alone together, "you, monsieur, are a brave man, and it does not become the brave to harbour vengeance. Nor does it become a brave nation to think hardly of any man because of his bravery, even though that nation itself be a sufferer. You know," he pursued, "what is said about you in England?"

Radisson interrupted his guest by protesting with suspicious warmth that he neither knew nor cared anything about such a matter.

"It is said, then," answered Godey, "that you have been a traitor to the king, and that there is no authority or defence for your conduct. You and Groseilliers, whilst professing friendship for the English Company have done them great injury, and endangered the peace between the two crowns."

To this Radisson made rejoinder:

"I am sorry; but all that I and my brother-in-law have done, is to be laid at the door of the Hudson's Bay Company. We wished honestly to serve them, but they cast us away as being no longer useful, when now they see what it is they have done, and how foolishly they have acted in listening to the counsels of Governor Bridgar. We really bear them no ill-will, neither the company nor his Royal Highness."*

*In "Radisson's Relation" there occurs the following passage:

"I acknowledge the disappointment I felt at being obliged to leave the English service on account of the ill-treatment I had received and that I would not be sorry to return, being in a better position than before to render service to the king and nation if justice were done me and my services recognized."



DRAWN FOR THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE BY ARTHUR HEMIN

RADISSON IN PARIS.

"The dual traitor was discovered, deeply engaged in drinking healths and in retailing his adventures to the applause of an appreciative circle."

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The gallant emissary reported the tenor of this conversation forthwith to his master, and both were agreed as to the sort of man they had to deal with. Godey expressed himself convinced that there would be little difficulty in inducing Radisson to return to the Company's service. On this advice Preston at once wrote off to Mr. Young telling him not to further press the Company's memorial to the king, nor to seek to have the French court take cognizance of and award recompense for the wrongs done the English interests. "Radisson has done this thing out of his own head, and he is the one man competent to undo it. He is, I learn, well-disposed to the English, and there is no reason if proper overtures be made him, why he should not do more for the English interests in that region than he has yet done."

At the same time La Barre, the French governor, was urged to make the most strenuous efforts to retain the advantages gained for the French by the two adventurers. A royal despatch of August 5th, 1683, and signed by Louis himself, runs as follows :

"I recommend you to prevent the English as much as possible from establishing themselves in Hudson's Bay, possession whereof was taken in my name several years ago ; and as Colonel d'Unguent,* appointed Governor of New York by the King of England, has had precise orders on the part of the said king to maintain good correspondence with us and carefully to avoid whatever may interrupt it, I

doubt not the difficulties you have experienced will cease for the future."

Louis was by no means desirous of rendering the position of his fellow monarch over the Channel uncomfortable. He was disposed to yield in a small matter when he had his own way in most of the large ones. Had Charles yielded to French representations about Port Nelson he would have given

great offence to his brother the Duke of York. Indeed, there is little doubt that had the Company not boasted members of such distinction or the patronage of royalty, the French would have at this juncture forced their demands and overwhelmed the



PRINCE RUPERT.

From the Painting of Sir Peter Lely in Hutson's Bay House, London.

* This is M. de la Barre's quaint fashion of spelling Dongan.

English possession. Radisson appears to have got wind of the situation and this was, perhaps, to him a greater argument for returning to the service of the power likely to be most permanent in Hudson's Bay. He, however, hung about idle in Paris for some weeks in a state of indecision. Had M. de Seignely exerted his full powers of persuasion, he might have induced our bushranger to remain in the service of Louis. But no such inducement was offered. There is some reason to believe that M. de Seignely undervalued Radisson; but in any case the apathy of the court influenced his actions.

The bushranger was, on the other hand, exhorted to return to his first engagement with the English, Lord Preston assuring him that if he could in reality execute what he proposed he would receive in

England from his Majesty, from his Royal Highness, from the Company, and from the nation "every sort of good treatment and entire satisfaction." The Duke's especial protection was also guaranteed. Our not too punctilious hero at length made up his mind as to the course he would pursue.

"I yielded," says he, "to these solicitations and determined to go to England forever, and so strongly bind myself to his Majesty's service, and to that of those interested in the nation, that no other cause could ever detach me from it."

But in order that he might have an excuse for his conduct, the very day that

he arrived at this decision he is found writing to the French Minister demanding a certain grant in the north-west of Canada as an alternative to a former proposal that "in consideration of his former discoveries, voyages and services he should be given every fourth beaver, trapped or otherwise caught in those territories." M. de Seignely had no suspicion of the depth of Radisson's duplicity. The minister thought him "a vain man, much given to boasting, who could do much harm, and had therefore best have his vanity tickled at home."

Up to the very eve of his departure, April 24, 1684, he is seen to be a daily attendant on the minister or his subor-

ordinates of the Department of Marine and Commerce. He is not always favoured with an audience; but when listened to speaks vaguely of fitting out and equipping vessels for

trade on voyages similar to those he had already undertaken. His *naïveté*, to use no harsher term, is remarkable.

"In order," says he, "that they should not suspect anything by my sudden absence, I told them I was obliged to take a short trip into the country on friendly family matters. *I myself made good use of this time to go to London.*"

He arrived in the English capital on the 10th of May, and immediately paid his respects to Mr. Young. The project for regaining possession of York Factory was canvassed. Radisson estimated that there would be between fifteen and twenty thousand beaver skins in



FROM AN OLD PRINT.

A DOG CARIOLE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

the hands of his nephew, awaiting shipment. The partners appeared more than satisfied, and Radisson met with a most cordial reception. He was assured that the company had entire confidence in him, and that their greatest regret was that there had been any misunderstanding between them. They would, it was declared on their behalf, make all amends in their power.

For a few weeks the Hudson's Bay bushranger found himself a lion. He was presented to the king in the course of a *levee*. Charles listened with the very greatest assumption of interest to

law. He was not wont to dress so when he was last here, but he has got him a new coat with much lace upon it, which he wears with his leather breeches and shoes. His hair is a perfect tangle. It is said he has made an excellent fortune for himself."

After a number of conferences with the partners, Radisson finally departed from Gravesend on May 17. Three ships set sail, that in which Radisson was embarked being named "The Happy Return." The elements being favourable, the little fleet reached the Straits more speedily than usual. The



A VISIT TO AN ENCAMPMENT OF INDIANS.

Reproduced from West's "Journal during a residence at the Red River Colony 1820-3."

the adventurer's account of himself, and to his asseverations of loyalty and good will. Radisson in the evening was taken to the play-house in the suite of his Royal Highness, and there by his bizarre attire attracted almost as much attention amongst the audience as the play itself.

"To the Duke's Play-house," writes John Selwyn to his wife, "where Radisson, the American fur-hunter, was in the Royal box. Never was such a combination of French, English and Indian savage as Sir John Kirke's son-in-

chief figure of this expedition, who had never borne a part in any joint enterprise without being animated by jealousy and distrust, found here ample scope for the exercise of his characteristic vices. During nearly the entire period of the voyage he evinced a perpetual and painful apprehension that one of the other ships carrying officials and servants of the company would, with malicious intentions, arrive before him.

His first concern on awaking in the morning was to be assured that the



MAP OF YORK FACTORY.

Reproduced from an old engraving in Robson's "Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay."

companion vessels were in sight, and although the "Happy Return" was the most sluggish sailer of the trio, yet to such good purpose were plied the bushranger's energies and promises that her commander's seamanship made her a capital match for the others.

But just before their destination was

or sleep, the entrance to Nelson River was reached. Imagine Radisson's surprise, as well as that of his companions, on beholding two ships at anchor, upon one of which a complete stranger to them, floated the Royal Standard of England.

It was the English frigate which had entered at Port Nelson. The other ship was the "Alert," commanded by Captain Outlaw, having brought out the company's new governor, William Phipps, the previous season. Radisson boldly headed his boat for this vessel, and when he drew near, perceived Bridgar's successor, with all his people in arms on the quarter-deck. The Governor, in a loud voice,



THE WINTERING CREEK IN HAY'S RIVER.

From an old print in Ellis' "Voyage to Hudson's Bay in 1746."

instantly demanded to know who Radisson was. Upon his making himself and his allegiance known, they decided to permit him to board the Company's ship. The bushranger first made it his care to be informed how the land lay, and he was inwardly rejoiced to learn that the Governor and his men had not dared to land out of fear of the French and Indians, who were considered hostile to the English interests. This was precisely the situation Radisson most desired; a thought seems to have struck him that after all, his nephew, Chouart, might prove intractable, and by no means so easily won over as he had anticipated. It therefore behooved him to act with adroitness and circumspection. Taking with him two men, Radisson proceeded up country in the direction of the abandoned York Factory, hourly hoping that they might discover something, or at least they should make someone hear or see a friendly Indian by firing musket shots or making a smoke. The attempt was not fruitless, as he tells us, for after a while they perceived ten canoes with Indians coming down the river. At first, he says, "I thought some Frenchmen might be with them, whom my nephew might have sent to discover who the new arrivals were." Upon this supposition Radisson severed himself from his comrades and going to meet the savages he made the usual signs to them from the bank, which the Indians at first seemed to respond to in no amiable spirit. Albeit, on addressing them in their own tongue, he was immediately recognized, the Indians testifying by shouts and playful postures to their joy at his arrival. He quickly learned from them that his nephew and the other Frenchmen were above the rapids, four leagues from the place where they then were. They had expected Groseilliers would accompany Radisson, and when they expressed surprise that this was not the case, Radisson did not scruple to tell them that Groseilliers awaited him at a short distance.

"But what," asked Radisson, "are you doing here? What brings you

into this part of the country and in such numbers?"

The savage leader's sudden confusion betrayed him to Radisson. The circumstance of the Indians voluntarily seeking trade with the English greatly simplified the situation.

"Look you," said he heartily, at the same time calling to Captain Geyer, who was in ambush hard by, "I am glad to find you seeking trade with the English. I have made peace with the English for the love of our Indian brothers; you, they and I are to be henceforth only one. Embrace us therefore in token of peace; this (pointing to Geyer) is your new brother. Go immediately to your son at the fort yonder and carry him these tidings and the proofs of peace. Tell him to come and see me at this place, while the others will wait for me at the mouth of the river."

It should be mentioned that the chief of this band had previously announced himself as young Chouart's sire, according to the Indian custom. He now readily departed on his mission.

Radisson, as may be imagined, passed an anxious night. The sun had been risen some hours before his eyes were gladdened by the sight of a canoe in which he descried Chouart. The young man's countenance wore, as well it might, an expression of profound amazement; and at first hardly the bare civilities of relation-ship passed between the pair. Chouart waited patiently for his uncle to render an explanation of the news which had reached him. Silently and slowly they walked together, and after a time the prince of liars, traitors, adventurers and bush-rangers began his account of his position.

Radisson states that his nephew immediately acquiesced in his scheme. A memoir penned in 1702, the year of Radisson's death, by M. Barthier of Quebec asserts that the young man received with the utmost disgust and flatly declined to entertain his relative's proposals. He expressed on the other hand the greatest grief on hearing the news; for he had begun to

believe that it was through their efforts that the dominion of the king had been extended in that region. Now it appeared that this labour had all been in vain. It was only his love for his mother, Radisson's sister, which prevented an open rebellion on the part of Chouart against the proposed treachery.

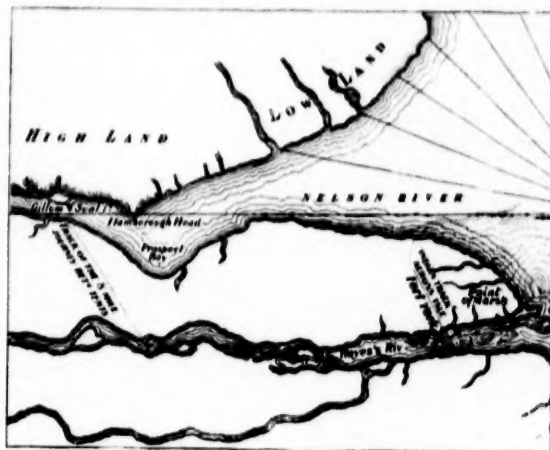
No rupture took place; the stronger and more crafty spirit prevailed. Chouart surrendered on the following day his command of the fort. He had, he complained expected a far different fate for the place and his men. The tattered old *fleur de lis* standard

brought by the *St. Anne's* captain from Quebec was lowered and the English emblem with the device of the company, run up in its stead. All the forces were assembled and amidst cheers for King Charles and the Honourable Adventurers, the Company's Governor took formal possession.

But the French bushrangers and sailors watched these proceedings with melancholy dissatisfaction, not perhaps as much from patriotic motives as from the frailty of their own tenure. They could no longer be assured of a livelihood amongst so many English, who bore themselves with so haughty a mien.

Radisson proceeded to make an inventory of all the skins on hand, together with all those concealed in *caches* in the woods. The results showed 239 packages of beaver, or about 12,000 skins together with merchandise sufficient to barter for seven or eight thousand more. Instructions were now given by Radisson, the Governor remaining passive, to have all these goods taken in canoes to the ships.

It now only remained for the bushranger to accomplish only one other object before setting sail with the cargo for England. Radisson speaks of himself as having a secret commission,



MAP SHOWING YORK FACTORY ON HAY'S RIVER.

Redrawn from a map in Robson's "Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay."

but I can find no authority for his statement. It involved the retention in the company's service of his nephew and the other Frenchmen, and even assuming that Radisson were armed with any such instructions, the plan was not likely to enjoy the approval of Governor Phipps who, if he were at the outset of his term of office, determined upon any one thing, it was that Port Nelson should be cleared of Frenchmen. Exactly how this was to be transacted was not quite clear, especially as there was yet no open rupture between the two authorities. But for such a rupture they had not long to wait. They were destined on the very eve of his departure to be involved in a quarrel.

Some years before an Assiniboine chief named Ka-chou-touay had taken Radisson to his bosom and adopted him as his son with all the customary ceremonies. This formidable chief who had been at war with a neighbouring tribe at the time of his adopted son's arrival in the country, now put in an appearance. Instead of the joy Radisson expected it was with reproaches that he was greeted. Ka-chou-touay informed him that a brother chief of his, named La Barbé, with one of his sons had been killed while expos-

tulating with a party of English. The consequences of this rash action might be so grave that Radisson felt it to be his duty to resort to the Governor and demand that his servants should be punished for the crime, or else he would not be answerable for the consequences. The Governor does not appear to have taken Radisson's demand in good part, declining altogether to intervene in the matter. The other now proceeded to commands and threats. He asserted that as long as he remained in the country the Governor was his subordinate, which greatly angered that official and high words passed.

The task the Governor had set himself was by no means easy, especially if he wished to avoid bloodshed. But the plan of overpowering and disarming the French was finally accomplished through strategy. All were escorted aboard the ship, even to Chouart himself, and on the fourth of September sail was set.

On this voyage Radisson's state of mind rivalled that which he had experienced when outward bound. His late anxiety to be the first upon the scene at Port Nelson was paralleled now by his desire to be first in London. If, happily, the company should first hear an account of what had transpired from himself he felt convinced full measure of justice would be done him. If, on the other hand, Governor Phipps' relation were first received there was no knowing how much prejudice might be raised against him.

Great as was his impatience he managed to hide it with adroitness, so that none save his nephew suspected the intention he shortly executed. The captain, crew and company's servants left the ship leisurely at Portsmouth. Those going up to London lingered for the coach, but not so with Radisson, who instantly made his way to the post-house, where he hired a second-rate steed, mounted it and without the courtesy of an adieu to his late comrades, broke into a gallop, hardly restrained until London bridge was reached.

His arrival took place close upon

midnight, but late as was the hour he took no thought of securing lodging or of apprizing his wife of his advent. He spurred on his stumbling horse to the dwelling of Mr. Young, in Wood Street, Cheapside. The honourable adventurer had retired for the night, but, nevertheless, in gown and night-cap welcomed Radisson with great cordiality. He listened, we are told, with the greatest interest and satisfaction to the bushranger's tale, garnished with details of his own marvellous prowess and zeal for the company. Nor, perhaps, was Radisson less satisfied when, on attaining his own lodging, he pondered on the day's exploits. He slumbered little, and at eleven o'clock Young was announced, and was ushered in, declaring that he had already been to Whitehall and apprized the Court of the good news. His Majesty and his Royal Highness had expressed a wish to see Radisson, the hero of these great doings, and Young was accordingly brought to escort the bushranger into the Royal presence. It was a triumph, but a short-lived one. Radisson had hardly left the precincts of the Court, his ears still ringing with the praises of King and courtiers, than the Deputy-Governor, Mr. Dering, received Phipps' account of the affair, which was almost as unfair to Radisson and the part he had played in the re-capture of Port Nelson, as Radisson's own account was flattering.

On the receipt of the report, a General Court of the Adventurers was held on September 26th. By the majority of members the bushranger was hardly likely to be accorded full justice, for great offence had been given by his presentation at Court and the extremely informal manner of his arrival. Despite the friendliness of Hayes, Young and several other partners, Radisson was suspended from any active employment in the Company's service. Not long afterwards, I find him in receipt of a pension of ten pounds a month from the Company, which he continued to enjoy for many years to the time of his death at Islington, in 1702.

To be Continued. (under different title)